

Legislation Honors the Memory of Rutgers University Student Tyler Clementi

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, U.S. Senator Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Representative Rush Holt (NJ-12) reintroduced legislation to help combat harassment and cyberbullying on college campuses by requiring for the first time that colleges and universities have anti-harassment policies on the books. The “Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act,” introduced in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, also provides funding for schools to establish or expand programs that help to prevent student harassment.

“Universities should not only be institutions of learning, but places of compassion and respect as well,” Holt said. “The purpose of our legislation, named in memory of Tyler Clementi, is to support colleges as they put in place and strengthen anti-harassment and anti-bullying programs. We can’t legislate tolerance, but we can work to make campuses a more positive and safe atmosphere.”

“The tragic impact of bullying has the attention of the entire nation, from forums at the White House to conversations around dinner tables, and we must all take steps to prevent harassment,” said Lautenberg, who is participating in an anti-bullying summit at the White House today. “This legislation would ensure that all college students have the opportunity to learn in a safe and civil environment. While there is no way to completely eliminate the cruelty that some students choose to inflict on their peers, there should be a clear code of conduct at all universities to prohibit harassment.”

The legislation is named in honor of Tyler Clementi, an 18 year-old freshman at Rutgers University who took his life in September 2010 after his roommate and another student harassed him and violated his privacy over the Internet.

Lautenberg’s and Holt’s legislation would require colleges and universities that receive federal student aid to have in place a policy that prohibits harassment of students based on their actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion. Schools would have to distribute that policy to all students, along with information about the procedure to follow should an incident of harassment occur, and notify students of counseling, mental health, and other services available to victims or perpetrators of harassment. The legislation would require schools to recognize cyberbullying as a form of harassment and it would create a new grant program at the U.S. Department of Education to help colleges and universities establish programs to prevent harassment of students.

The bill is supported by Garden State Equality, the Human Rights Campaign, the National Women’s Law Center, the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the Anti-Defamation League, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), the

Trevor Project, Security on Campus, Inc., National Center for Transgender Equality, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund.

Cosponsors of the bill in the Senate include Senators Daniel Akaka (D-HI), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), and Ron Wyden (D-OR).

In the House, the bill is cosponsored by Representatives Mike Honda (D-CA-15), Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ-6), Bill Pascrell (D-NJ-8), Steve Rothman (D-NJ-9), Linda Sanchez (D-CA-39), and Albio Sires (D-NJ-13).

###